NO. 4

ONI PRESS

SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS

DANIEL ZIEGLER

NICK CAGNETTI

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DO I EVEN WANT TO KNOW ANY MORE?

ERIK, A MURDERER. ***RUPERT,*** DEAD. ***KATRINA,*** CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE...

I ***FEAR*** WHAT'S NEXT.

WHERE HAVE YOU TAKEN ME?

CRESCENT MANOR. THE SITE OF MY ***REBIRTH.*** I SUPPOSE IT WASN'T AS ABANDONED AS THEY SAY.

WHY DID YOU HAVE TO ***KILL*** HIM?

I SAW WHAT HE DID TO YOU AT THE ***PARTY.*** I TRUST IT'S ***WORSE*** WITHOUT A CROWD.

BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN JUST--

WHAT?! PROTECT YOU?! SAVE YOU?! FROM THAT MONSTER?!

TOO MUCH.

:SOB:
:SNIFF:
I'M SORRY. BUT HE DIDN'T DESERVE YOU.
HE DIDN'T DESERVE TO *LIVE.*
WHO ARE YOU TO MAKE THAT CHOICE?
THE MAN WHO *LOVES* YOU.
THE MAN WHO WANTS NOTHING MORE THAN TO RETURN TO *THIS.*
NOW WE HAVE THAT CHANCE.
PROMISE ME YOU'LL *NEVER* DO IT AGAIN.
YOU HAVE MY WORD.
PLUD
SLAM!

YOU!

POOF

ERIK! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

IT'S HIM!

HE'S THE ONE WHO DID THIS TO ME!

:AGKKK!:

L... LAEMMLE...

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

LORD LAEMMLE.

IT WAS LAEMMLE. HE MADE ME DO IT.

I DIDN'T WANT TO. I SWEAR.

:KOFF:

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

YOUR FATHER WAS ***OBSESSED.*** OBSESSED WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF ***RESURRECTION.***

WHEN HE LEARNED OF MY EXPERIMENTS, MY RESEARCH, HE HELD ME ***HOSTAGE*** RIGHT HERE IN THIS HAUNTED PLACE.

WHERE HE KNEW ***NO ONE*** WOULD DARE COME LOOKING.

HE THREATENED TO HAVE ME ARRESTED... ***EXECUTED*** IF I DIDN'T COMPLY.

BUT I ONLY EVER TINKERED WITH THOSE ***ALREADY DEAD.*** I NEVER ***KILLED.*** NEVER...UNTIL...

PLEASE, ***FORGIVE ME.***

BUT ***WHY?!***

WHY WOULD HE WISH TO ***BRING BACK THE DEAD?***

I SUSPECT YOU ALREADY KNOW.

MOTHER...

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

YOU'LL ***DETERIORATE*** WITHOUT MAINTENANCE!

I'M GOING TO ***KILL*** ALBERT LAEMMLE.

WAIT! REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAID BACK THEN? LET'S ***RUN OFF TOGETHER.***

THERE'S ***NOTHING*** FOR US HERE. ***FORGET*** ABOUT HIM.

WE DON'T HAVE TO ***RUN*** ANYMORE.

I CAN ***END*** THIS ***FOREVER.***

BUT...YOU PROMISED...

STAY HERE! I WON'T BE LONG.

POP

YOU'RE LOOKING WELL, *ERIK.*

OR DO YOU PREFER *"SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS"* NOW?

I HEAR THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE CALLING *TERAMERE'S* MYSTERIOUS *NEW MONSTER.*

I SUPPOSE YOU'RE HERE TO *KILL* ME.

BUT *DEATH* DOESN'T MEAN A DAMN THING ANYMORE THANKS TO YOU.

SPLSH

YOU TOOK *EVERYTHING* FROM ME! SO YES, IT'S ONLY *FAIR.*

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF *FAIRNESS?* YOU THINK YOU'RE THE *ONLY ONE* WHO LOST EVERYTHING?

SO IT'S TRUE. IT WAS ALL FOR YOUR *WIFE.*

TEN YEARS OF LOVE. THIRTY YEARS OF *TORTURE.* WITH ONLY ONE IMPOSSIBLE *REMEDY.*

YOU COULDN'T EVEN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT'S LIKE.

BEING FACED WITH THE *UNBREAKABLE* WALL OF *MORTALITY* KNOWING YOU'RE *POWERLESS* TO TEAR IT DOWN.

UNTIL I WASN'T.

THE *DOCTOR* CHANGED THAT. *YOU* CHANGED THAT.

WHAT AN HONOR.

DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF. WE NEEDED A *TEST.*

AND WITH YOU SPOUTING OFF ABOUT RUNNING AWAY WITH MY KATRINA, I NEEDED YOU *GONE.*

IF IT WORKED, WE'D SHIP YOU OVERSEAS, *TOO POOR* TO RETURN AND *TOO CRAZY* TO BE BELIEVED.

IF IT DIDN'T, WELL, NO ONE WOULD MISS A POOR FIDDLER BOY.

CRSSH

IF YOU DO SEE HER AGAIN AFTER THIS, I HOPE SHE *HATES* YOU.

WHAT YOU'VE *BECOME.*

WHAT *I'VE* BECOME? THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ME AND YOU IS...

...*TIME.*

HUH?

WAIT...

WAIT!

AAAH!

PLOP.

MY HAND!

WHAT'S GOING ON?

IT CAN'T BE...

THIS IS THE ONE.

THE SPIRIT SUPPRESSOR...

THE TROUBLE IS THAT THE SPELL ONLY WORKS IF ***ERIK REQUESTS IT HIMSELF.***

YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIM MAY DICTATE HOW BEST TO ***PERSUADE*** HIM.

AS I SEE IT, THE ***BARRIER*** TO OVERCOME IS ***HOPE.***

WHATEVER HE STILL HAS TO LIVE FOR, TO DIE FOR, MUST BE ***EXTINGUISHED.***

AFTER I DIED, I TOO HAD HOPE. HOPE TO FINALLY REUNITE WITH MY ***WIFE.***

ONLY TO LEARN THAT SHE WASN'T THERE ANYMORE.

SHE HAD MOVED ON TO A HIGHER REALM IN THE AFTERLIFE, ONE THAT I WASN'T ALLOWED INTO, GIVEN MY ***ACTIONS.***

SO YOUR CONDUCT DOES HAVE AN ***IMPACT*** IN THE AFTERLIFE...

DOES THE NAME "KATRINA LAEMMLE" MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?

I BELIEVE I SAW IT ON A ***PORTRAIT*** IN THE MANOR.

SHE WAS MY ***DAUGHTER.*** AND HE WAS OBSESSED WITH HER.

I DON'T KNOW HOW SHE GOT THERE, BUT IN TIME SHE TOO ARRIVED IN THE ***AFTERLIFE.***

AND WAS ALSO WELCOMED INTO THAT SACRED REALM WITH MY WIFE.

IF HIS COMPANION WAS *DEAD,* THEN PERHAPS...

...ALL THOSE KIDNAPPINGS. THE EXPERIMENTS. HE WAS TRYING TO *BRING HER BACK.*

ERIK WILL DO *WHATEVER* IT TAKES TO BE WITH HER AGAIN.

BUT GIVEN WHAT YOU'VE TOLD ME ABOUT HIS PAST, I AM CERTAIN THAT WILL END IN *FAILURE,* AS IT DID FOR ME.

IF WE INFORM HIM OF THIS, HE WILL HAVE *NOTHING* LEFT.

AND IT WON'T EVEN BE A *LIE.*

AND HOW WOULD WE RELAY THE INFORMATION?

IF YOU WANT TO STRIKE AT HIS EMOTIONAL CORE, THE ONLY MESSENGER FOR THE JOB IS *KATRINA* HERSELF.

IS THIS A SUFFICIENT RENDERING?

PERFECT.

I'M SORRY, ERIK. THE *WITCH* HAD ME IN A TRANCE, THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO.

I KNOW. *ELIZABETH.*

AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT, I MET HER IN THE AFTERLIFE.

SHE WAS TRYING TO BRING HER *SISTER* BACK. ONE OF OUR... SUBJECTS.

BUT SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHO I AM. WHAT I DID.

WELL, BY THE LOOKS OF IT, NO ONE IS EVER COMING BACK AGAIN NOW.

AS IT SHOULD BE.

OTHER THAN THEM, I SUPPOSE.

PLEASE, TELL ME YOU CAN *END* THIS. I MUST RETURN TO THE SPIRIT REALM AT ONCE.

I'M AFRAID A *MAGIC PROBLEM* REQUIRES A *MAGIC SOLUTION.*

AND I'M MERELY A *DOCTOR.*

OH, ERIK...

KATRINA-- MY LOVE!

PERHAPS YOU MAY NOT WANT TO END IT AFTER ALL.

I PROMISE I'VE BEEN WORKING MY WAY BACK TO YOU.

THIS IS JUST AN UNFORTUNATE *DETOUR.*

I'M AFRAID IT'S NOT THAT *SIMPLE.*

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT *PAINS* ME TO SAY THIS, BUT I KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO GET WHERE I AM.

AND I KNOW THEY'LL *NEVER* ALLOW YOU HERE WITH ME AFTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE.

DON'T SAY THAT. THERE HAS TO BE A CHANCE, EVEN A *SLIM* ONE.

IT'S *HOPELESS.*

YOU MUST *FORGET* ABOUT ME, AS I WILL YOU, IN TIME.

BUT...

GOODBYE, ERIK.

NO...

NO, IT CAN'T BE...

WITHOUT YOU, I'M *LOST.*

I HAVE *NOTHING.* I...

ERIK!

I THOUGHT I'D NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!

IT MAY HAVE BEEN BETTER IF YOU NEVER DID.

WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT?

ELIZABETH, I...I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM.

I'M A MAN WHO DID *TERRIBLE THINGS* IN THE NAME OF *LOVE.*

A MAN DELUDED ENOUGH TO THINK HE STILL HAD A CHANCE AT *HAPPINESS.*

BUT I DO *KNOW.* SINCE YOU LEFT, I'VE STILL BEEN COLLECTING YOUR PAGES.

YOU HAVE? AND YOU KNOW ABOUT THE *MURDERS?*

YES. IT WASN'T RIGHT, BUT I CAN UNDERSTAND.

RUPERT WAS *ABUSIVE.* LORD LAEMMLE WAS A *MURDERER.*

YOU WERE ONLY *DEFENDING* YOURSELF AND KATRINA.

OH... IS THAT ALL YOU SAW?

THAT'S WHEN I GOT DRAGGED BACK HERE.

I WISH THAT WAS THE *END* OF IT. IF IT WAS, I MAY STILL HAVE A *CHANCE.*

BUT I REMEMBER IT ALL *NOW.*

AND WHAT CAME NEXT WAS THE *WORST* OF ALL.

"YES, I *KILLED* LORD LAEMMLE THAT NIGHT.

"BUT HE WASN'T THE ONLY ONE IN THAT MANOR."

HELP

KATRINA?!

"I WAS TOO STRONG TO *DIE*.

"BUT *TOO WEAK* TO SAVE HER FROM WHAT I STARTED."

I'M SO SORRY. THAT'S *TRAGIC*.

YOU'RE RIGHT.

"HER BODY WAS *GONE*.

"SO HER *SPIRIT* WAS DESPERATE FOR A *NEW HOME*.

"AND I MADE IT MY *DUTY* TO FIND HER ONE."

ARE YOU *MAD*? REANIMATION IS ONE THING, BUT A SPIRIT TRANSFER INTO A *NEW BODY*?

SLAM

I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF IT'S POSSIBLE.

MAKE IT POSSIBLE!

BUT THAT WAS ONLY THE *BEGINNING*.

"AGAINST MY ORDER, WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE, MY BELOVED KATRINA HAD *FOLLOWED* ME."

BAM BAM BAM

I TOLD YOU TO STAY BACK!

"AS THE DOCTOR WARNED, MY ABILITIES WERE *DETERIORATING*.

"THE LOSS OF MY LOVE LEFT A *HOLE* IN MY SOUL THAT ONLY SHE COULD FILL.

"BUT I WAS A *DEAD MAN* IN MOURNING.

"IF I COULD COME BACK, WHY COULDN'T SHE?

"I FORCED THE DOCTOR TO DO MY BIDDING.

"BUT EVERY ATTEMPT WAS A *FAILURE*.

"AND EVERY FAILURE MEANT *DEATH* FOR MY CHOSEN VICTIMS.

"SO MANY INNOCENT SOULS, ALL IN THE IMAGE OF MY LOVE, TAKEN IN THE NAME OF THAT *LOVE*."

IT ALL HAPPENED HERE.

ONCE AGAIN SHROUDED BY THE TOWN'S FEAR OF THIS HAUNTED MANOR AND THE SUPPOSED ***SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS,*** AS I BECAME KNOWN.

"THOSE WHO NEAR THE CRESCENT MANOR, PERCHED BENEATH THE CRESCENT MOON, CALL THE SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS, CAUSING THEM TO MEET THEIR ***DOOM.***"

AND I'M AFRAID THAT'S NOT ALL.

IS THAT...?

IT WAS YOU ALL ALONG.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN?

SINCE THOSE FIRST ***PAGES*** WE FOUND TOGETHER.

AND YOU KEPT IT FROM ME?!

HOW COULD YOU?!

RUN!

IT'S THE SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS!

DO YOU SEE HIM, *HARUSPEX,* MY PET?

DON'T LOSE TRACK OF HIM.

ABOUT TIME THAT WINGED CREATURE MADE HIMSELF *USEFUL.*

IT APPEARS OUR *TRICK* WORKED.

STAY HIDDEN.

WELL, IF IT ISN'T THE SPIRIT OF THE SHADOWS...

DO WHAT YOU WANT WITH ME. I WON'T PUT UP A *FIGHT.*

OH? WHY THE CHANGE OF HEART?

I THOUGHT I STILL HAD SOMETHING WORTH REMAINING FOR.

IT SEEMS I WAS *WRONG.*

PERHAPS I MAY BE OF *ASSISTANCE* AFTER ALL.

THERE IS A *SPELL,* DESIGNED TO...PUT YOU AT *PEACE.*

IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT.

NO MORE *SADNESS,* NO *JUDGMENT,* NO *GUILT.*

YOUR ETERNAL SPIRIT SHALL *CEASE TO EXIST.*

ARE YOU INTERESTED?

YES. THAT'S ALL I WANT.

CREEAK

SO YOU MUST BE *ELIZABETH.*

OH, IT'S YOU. I'VE SEEN YOU IN HIS *MEMORIES.*

BASED ON YOUR TEARS, I TAKE IT YOU LEARNED THE *TRUTH* ABOUT YOUR DEATH.

HOW COULD YOU GO ALONG WITH IT?

TRUTHFULLY... BECAUSE I'M A *COWARD.*

I FOUGHT BACK AS MUCH AS HE WOULD LET ME, BUT I COULD HAVE DONE *MORE.*

HELL, MY COWARDICE IS WHAT KILLED HIM THE FIRST TIME, TOO.

I WAS *MORTIFIED* BY THE LOSS OF INNOCENT LIVES SUCH AS YOURS.

BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS A SMALL, TWISTED PART OF ME THAT WANTED HIM TO *SUCCEED.*

TO LIVE THE LIFE I *ROBBED* HIM OF AND REUNITE HIM WITH THE LOVE HE BARELY GOT TO KNOW.

I THOUGHT HE WAS MY *FRIEND.*

YOU KNOW, THIS IS THE VERY PLACE HE *DIED.*

WELL, THE *SECOND* TIME.

AT THE END, HE WAS ***HAUNTED*** BY THE WEIGHT OF HIS ACTIONS.

HOW CAN YOU ATONE FOR YEARS OF ***DEATH*** WHEN GIVING EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DOESN'T EVEN BALANCE THE SCALES?

THIS IS THE ***BURDEN*** HE CARRIED INTO THE AFTERLIFE.

AND THEN HE ***SAVED*** ME.

ERIK AND LAEMMLE WERE BOTH PLAGUED BY ***GRIEF.*** AND GRIEF IS COMPLICATED.

THE PATH TO RECOVERY IS PAVED WITH ***PAIN*** AND ***POOR DECISIONS.***

TRAGEDY BREEDS MORE TRAGEDY, UNTIL SOMEONE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO ***END THE CYCLE.***

HE WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH. I WASN'T STRONG ENOUGH. PERHAPS ***YOU*** WILL BE.

PERHAPS, WHEN HE SAVED YOU, YOU ALSO ***SAVED HIM.*** AND HE REALLY IS YOUR ***FRIEND*** AFTER ALL.

NO...

WHAT IS IT?

TRUST ME, YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW.

STAY HERE!

REGNA!
VIVIT!
MORTUOUS!

LET HIM GO!

THIS VIOLENCE WON'T END WELL FOR ANYONE.

YOU FOOL, HE *ASKED* FOR THIS!

IT'S *TRUE.* LET HER FINISH.

I HAVE *NOTHING* LEFT.

SVAM.

IT MAY FEEL THAT WAY.

BUT I JUST SPOKE TO SOMEONE WHO STILL *NEEDS* YOU.

SOMEONE WHO CONSIDERED YOU A *FRIEND.*

HER NAME WAS *ELIZABETH.*

WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

YOU'VE SEEN HER?! IS SHE HERE?! IS SHE ONE OF THOSE SPIRITS?!

TELL ME!

CURIOUS. YOU DIDN'T EVEN THINK TO LOOK...

THAT'S ENOUGH FROM YOU!

SHUNK

ToK

THUP

HOW DARE YOU! I WASN'T DONE WITH HIM!

HE WAS LYING TO DISTRACT YOU! NOW HURRY UP AND FINISH THIS!

LAEMMLE?

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF THIS? IS *ELIZABETH* REALLY HERE?

YES.

NOW LET HIM GO, WITCH.

NEXT: THE VIRTUOUS VICTIM!

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